

ЛЕНИНСКАЯ БИБЛИОТЕКА

Z. LILINA

LENIN
AS A
PERSON



ГОСУД. ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО

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Lenin as a Person

by

Zlata Lalina
(Zina Levina)

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Meeting Ilyich.

I first met Lenin in the spring of 1903, when he arrived in Bern (Switzerland) to deliver three lectures on the agrarian question. I knew of Lenin through his articles in *Iskra* [The Spark], as well as through the polemical pieces written against him in the SR journal *Revolutionary Russia*, in *Rabochaya Mysl* [Workers' Thought], and in the Economists' journal, *Rabocheye Delo* [The Workers' Cause]. But I did not know him personally. In one of his articles in *Iskra*—I cannot recall on what specific occasion—Martov had dubbed Lenin the “tempting serpent.” And I felt a burning desire to meet this Lenin—this “tempting serpent” of whom everyone spoke and wrote, this Lenin who occupied the minds of all—both friends and foes alike. For some reason, I had pictured him as a large, imposing man, somewhat in the mold of Plekhanov.

The day of his arrival finally came. Lenin's lecture was scheduled to take place at one of Bern's cafés. The audience had gathered well in advance. By the time I arrived, the hall was already packed. I remember that when one of the comrades asked, “Why are you so late?”

I replied in a joking tone: “The ‘tempting serpent’ won't start without me.”

“Are you quite sure about that?” a small, broad-shouldered man suddenly asked me, his eyes piercing and a broad smile beaming across his face.

“Quite sure,” I retorted spiritedly.

“In that case, shall I give the order to begin? I am the speaker.” I stood frozen in shock. So *this* was Lenin. And to think I had been speaking to him in such a tone! Lenin would often—during moments of a playful mood—remind me of our first meeting. I believe that this initial encounter subsequently enabled me to see in Comrade Lenin not only the great teacher but also Lenin the man.

I met with Comrade Lenin a second time after the Second Party Congress—after the split within the Party. Comrade Lenin arrived in Bern to deliver a report. I do not recall exactly whether it was toward the end of 1903 or the beginning of 1904; at that time, he was touring Switzerland, delivering reports on the subject of our disagreements with the Mensheviks. It was decided that the funds raised from these lectures would be used to launch the Bolshevik newspaper *Vperёд* [Forward]. The day after his lecture, Comrade Lenin gathered us—the small Bern group of Bolsheviks—for a close-knit discussion regarding Party affairs. One had to see the attentiveness with which Comrade Lenin listened to every question we asked and every remark we made, and the thoroughness with which he clarified all our points of confusion.

This brings to mind a similar conversation I had with Comrade Plekhanov. Comrade Plekhanov, too—having arrived in Bern after the Second Party Congress to deliver a report—gathered us for a private discussion. I recall that one of the members of our Bolshevik group, Comrade Andreev, asked Comrade Plekhanov:

“Could you explain to us what guided your actions when, during the Congress, you sided with the Bolsheviks, yet switched your allegiance to the Mensheviks after the Congress?”

Plekhanov flared up and replied in these exact words: “You are still too young to be asking me such questions. Do you realize that when your father was courting your mother, I was already a socialist?”

With this remark, Plekhanov neatly sidestepped answering the questions that were of such deep concern to all of us. Comrade Lenin never reproached us for being young. Our youth delighted him, for he—together with us—and we—together with him—were always young.

In connection with the launch of the newspaper *Vperёд*, Comrade Lenin questioned me in great detail during the spring of 1904—at the congress of Bolshevik groups in Geneva—asking whether I knew the Jewish “jargon” (Yiddish), whether I could read and write in it, whether I was able to translate from Russian into it, and so on.

“What is all this for?” I asked V.I.

“Are you aware of our disagreements with the Bund?” he asked me in return.

“I am.”

“And what is your stance regarding their demand for the exclusive right to lead the Jewish proletariat?”

“I do not agree with them. Surely we aren’t going to set up a Bund organization in St. Petersburg for Jewish workers who speak Russian perfectly well? Why shouldn’t they simply be members of the Russian Social Democratic Party?”

“Precisely. But in other parts of Russia—is it necessary to build Bund organizations there?” V.I. asked.

“That depends on the circumstances,” I replied.

“Well, exactly. Now do you understand why it is necessary to know the jargon?”

I understood Vladimir Ilyich. He was always easy to understand: with his leading questions, he invariably helped make sense of even the most complex matters.

The Setting in which Comrade Lenin Worked.

Until 1908, I had never visited Comrade Lenin's home—aside from visits made in 1906 to his apartment in Kuokkala (Finland). However, there were always many people there, and we would only stop by for an hour or two—strictly on business.

I first visited Comrade Lenin's apartment in the autumn of 1908 in Geneva (Switzerland). I had arrived from Russia that September. Nadezhda Konstantinovna met me at the train station and took me back to her home. I was ushered into a small Swiss apartment consisting of just two rooms and a kitchen. The larger of the two rooms was occupied by Vladimir Ilyich and Nadezhda Konstantinovna, while Nadezhda Konstantinovna's mother lived in the second room. Nadezhda Konstantinovna and her mother managed the household affairs and did all the cooking themselves. They all ate their meals together in the kitchen. Vladimir Ilyich spent the greater part of his day at the library or at the editorial offices of the Bolshevik newspaper *Proletarii*. Later on—once Zinoviev and I had found an apartment of our own—Comrade Lenin would spend his evenings at our place, reading the newspapers.

In December 1908, we moved to Paris. There, too, the "Ilyiches"—as we affectionately nicknamed them—settled into an apartment just as modest and diminutive as the last, located on Rue Marie-Rose. Vladimir Ilyich continued to spend the bulk of his day at the library; he did his work at home during the

evenings. Vladimir Ilyich rarely allowed himself to be distracted from his usual work, and even then, only for official business—a report, a meeting, or a discussion with comrades regarding party affairs. V.I. almost never went to the theater. If a spare moment did present itself, he would go for a walk—usually out in the countryside. V.I. was very fond of gathering mushrooms.

We spent the entire summer of 1911 together in a small village near Paris called Longjumeau, where a Bolshevik party school had been established. V.I. worked six days a week, never allowing himself a single minute of rest. However, one day a week—though never on a Sunday, when, as he put it, the crowds of strollers made it impossible to get around—he would rest completely. On those days, all four of us—Vladimir Ilyich, Nadezhda Konstantinovna, Zinoviev, and I—would hop on our bicycles and ride out into the countryside, leaving at six in the morning and returning between ten and eleven at night. The one condition V.I. imposed for these outings was: not a single word about politics.

The first time we went out, it struck me as odd: what on earth would we talk about if we couldn't discuss politics? But it turned out that one could talk to V.I. about a great many things without ever touching upon politics.

V.I. was an excellent cyclist. On the road, he kept a watchful eye on Nadezhda Konstantinovna and me, and quite often he would tow us along behind his own bicycle.

We moved to Krakow in the spring of 1912, just as the daily Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* began publication in St. Petersburg. Initially, we shared a small apartment with Comrade Lenin. They and we each occupied two rooms, and we all took our meals together in the kitchen. Later on, we lived in two adjacent houses. V.I. usually rose at about nine in the morning and worked until the mail arrived. The mail came at twelve

o'clock. We would all gather together to read the mail. Here, all matters related to news from Russia were discussed, and articles for the upcoming issue of *Pravda* were assigned; afterward, we would have lunch—a meal that invariably consisted of soup and minced meat patties (just as dinner did)—and then retire to our respective rooms.

V.I. would rest and work without leaving his room until nine o'clock in the evening. At nine o'clock, V.I. would personally gather the articles to be dispatched to Russia. He was always the first to be ready and would carry the mail to the train station himself. V.I. reviewed every article sent from Kraków to *Pravda*. He never missed an opportunity to offer praise for a job well done. Even while living in Kraków—right on the Russian border and fully immersed in Russian affairs—V.I. still managed to find time, two or three times a week during the winter, to go ice skating.

For two consecutive summers, we lived just outside Kraków, in the village of Poronin. We would head there in May and return in September. And there, too, the Lenins occupied their customary two small rooms and a kitchen within a peasant's cottage. And there, too, the work continued—tireless and unceasing—seven days a week. Their only form of recreation was the walk to the post office and to our place—for we lived right near the post office. Occasionally—a longer walk into the woods to gather mushrooms; very rarely—perhaps only twice a summer—a trip to the mountains.

Vladimir Ilyich was indefatigable. He could sit for hours and days on end without tearing himself away from his work. V.I. attached immense importance to figures and statistics. I remember how V.I. personally undertook the task of determining the Party's membership composition based on the penny-contributions that workers made to *Pravda's* "Iron Fund."

Under V.I.'s analysis, the figures came to life. They transformed into Party members, sympathizers, and newspaper readers; they coalesced into study circles; they represented the conscious segment of the working class—its vanguard.

V.I. saw every task through to the very end. He never scattered his energies but always concentrated his entire train of thought upon the specific issue he was examining. The one thing V.I. could not tolerate was noise. Whenever V.I. was working, absolute silence reigned all around him. We were all well aware of this particular trait of Ilyich's and did everything in our power to safeguard his peace and quiet. Little Stepa—V.I.'s favorite—knew this as well; he would invariably quiet down whenever he knew that "Volodya" was writing. But conversely, the moment "Volodya" finished writing, Stepa and V.I. would certainly make their presence known. At such times, the house would be in an absolute uproar.

Lenin as a Person.

Bourgeois writers portray Lenin as a cruel, callous, and ruthless man. How little those bourgeois scribblers actually knew Comrade Lenin! V. I. was indeed ruthless and implacable toward the bourgeoisie and the social-traitors of all countries. Yet with what ardent love he cherished the working class—and every single worker individually! How completely he opened himself up; how readily he reached out to the rising generation of Party youth! He never tired of explaining and clarifying to every individual comrade anything that they found difficult to grasp on their own. (One had only to say, “V.I., I don’t understand; help me make sense of this” and V.I. would interpret and explain until everything unclear became clear and comprehensible.

The young people knew and appreciated this trait of V.I.’s character, and at times they even took advantage of it. Going to V.I. with a question or for advice was simplicity itself. This brings to mind the following incident. Comrades Zinoviev, Vladimirov, and Stavsky traveled from Bern to Geneva to meet Plekhanov and Lenin. Later, all three of them described these two meetings:

“At Plekhanov’s, we were received in the drawing room and treated to coffee in cups the size of thimbles.”

I remember Comrade Stavsky telling me: “It was terrifying for me—a worker—to sit on a fragile little chair and handle that tiny cup.”

And Comrade Plekhanov, they said, “did nothing but lecture and instruct us. But when we went to see Comrade Lenin, we were shown into his room. He conversed with us at length, and then invited us to have tea. He led us into the kitchen. There, on the table, stood a kettle of boiling water, cups, bread, and butter. Nadezhda Konstantinovna poured the tea. A lively conversation sprang up among us regarding the state of affairs in Russia and Party matters.”

“We simply didn't want to leave Ilyich,” all three of them told me.

V.I. was always extraordinarily attentive to “Grandma”—N.K.'s mother—and especially to N.K. When N.K. fell ill, Vladimir Ilyich stoked the stove himself, helped his grandmother with the household chores, and strove, as much as possible, to spare N. K. from the cares and burdens of running the house.

Wherever V. I. went, he brought with him a sense of animation and joy. I never saw V. I. looking despondent or in a depressed state. When V. I. grew quiet and withdrew into himself, we knew that he was grappling with new, complex problems. But once a solution was found and a path charted, V. I. would once again be brimming with energy and vitality, and the space around him would once again be filled with sound. V. I. loved to tease and joke with us—the younger generation. Yet he always did so in such a tone that, far from taking offense, we would instead join him in roaring with laughter.

Working with V. I. was a lighthearted and joyful experience. In Kraków, during the years 1912–14, I was entrusted with managing the transport of underground literature into Russia.

Such work is frequently fraught with setbacks and failures. After each failure, I would often walk around feeling utterly devastated.

“Well, why are you ‘dissatisfied with all the neighbors’ again (a favorite saying of V. I.)?” Ilyich would ask.

“Yes, things are bad. Another failure. I don’t know what to do.”

“Why don’t you just start over? This time, surely, everything will go well,” Comrade Lenin would typically reply with cheerful optimism. And so we would start over and resume our work, for we knew that V. I. took a genuine interest in our efforts—an interest in every single newspaper or pamphlet successfully delivered to Russia.

Quite often, while in Kraków, we found ourselves completely out of money. Then V. I. arrived . . . he saw that something wasn’t going right for me.

“What is the matter?”

“Well, V.I., we have no money; we have nothing to work with.”

“And so you’ve hung your heads? Do you not know that *no money precedes money*? The money will come.”

“From where?”

“Does it really matter? In the meantime, just keep working.”

And so we kept working, for Ilyich inspired us with renewed vigor.

And how deeply V.I. loved his mother! What a tender, attentive son he was! What a deeply loving brother he was! Vladimir Ilyich often spoke of his younger sister, Manyusha (Maria Ilyinichna, the editor of *Moskovskaya Pravda*). He always spoke of her with such tenderness—with such affection—that I, never having met her, imagined that Manyusha was still a little girl.

Only those who did not know Ilyich—only those whom Ilyich loathed with all his soul: the bourgeoisie—could ever speak of him as a callous, hard-hearted man. V.I. was capable of loving the working class and its allies just as passionately as he was capable of hating its enemies.

Lenin and Children.

Comrade Lenin, who never had children of his own, loved little ones dearly. Nadezhda Konstantinovna told me how Ilyich grew attached—during his exile—to Misha, the young son of one of his comrades; and how deeply he suffered when the boy's father refused to let the Lenins adopt him as they were preparing to leave their place of exile. I had the privilege of witnessing V.I.'s affection for my own little son—Stepa. When Stepa was born, V.I. spent a long time observing him, constantly asking why he was crying. As Stepa began to grow—learning to walk and talk— a warm bond of affection formed between him and V.I. V.I. played with Stepa with great energy, cheerfulness, and enthusiasm. He never tired of crawling under the bed and the sofa to retrieve Stepa's ball. He would carry Stepa on his shoulders, race him in the yard, and dutifully carry out his every command. Sometimes, V.I. and Stepa would turn the entire room upside down. When the commotion grew particularly loud, I would try to intervene and stop them; but Ilyich would invariably declare: "Don't interfere—we're playing!"

One day, V.I. and I were walking along the road toward their home. Stepa was running ahead of us. Suddenly, V.I. remarked: "Oh, it's such a pity that we don't have a little Stepa of our own."

V.I. loved not only Stepa but children in general. I became fully convinced of this in 1921—the year of the great famine in

Russia. Petrograd's allocation of children's food rations had been drastically cut. I traveled to Moscow, pleading my case and knocking on every door imaginable—yet I was unable to secure any additional rations. So, knowing Comrade Lenin's love for children, I went to see him. He received me and asked me to give a detailed report on our work with children in Petrograd. He listened to me with that deep attention so characteristic of Ilyich; he asked me a series of questions and, right there in my presence, began telephoning the People's Commissariat of Food Supply, issuing an order to allocate an additional 5,000 rations to the children of Petrograd from the emergency grain reserves.

V.I. took a keen interest in the work being done in Petrograd in the field of public education. Whenever I visited Moscow, I would usually call upon Nadezhda Konstantinovna; there, upon meeting me, Vladimir Ilyich would typically ask me about our work. The last time I spoke with V.I. was in the winter of 1922. During lunch, N.K. told him about our work in Petrograd. He listened attentively, praised us—the Petrograders—and then remarked, jokingly: “And yet, you Petrograders are separatists.”

“But are you, V.I., satisfied with our work nonetheless?”

In response, Ilyich merely smiled that sly smile of his.

I have not seen V.I. since then. And I shall never see him again! But to forget... I shall never forget him! It is impossible to forget V.I. To forget him would be to cease to exist.

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The Leningrad Branch of the State Publishing House, with the aim of perpetuating the memory of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, has set itself the immediate task of publishing a series of small, popular pamphlets about Lenin—comprising works written both before Vladimir Ilyich's death and those published following his passing.

These pamphlets, compact in size, are printed in large type and feature high-quality artistic covers designed to complement the specific content of each booklet. Certain series of brochures—specifically those dedicated to Lenin's death and funeral—include the final photographs taken in the Hall of Columns at the House of Unions in Moscow.

Furthermore, in order to familiarize the broadest strata of workers and peasants with selected works by Vladimir Ilyich, the most characteristic articles by Ilyich have been selected from his *Complete Collected Works* and are being published as individual pamphlets.

To ensure that the image of Vladimir Ilyich is preserved for the entire world, work has begun on the publication of various artistic portraits of Vladimir Ilyich. The artists involved include Chekhonin, Vereisky, Belukha, and other renowned Leningrad artists.

Additionally, various postcards featuring images of Ilyich—including both photographs taken during his lifetime and posthumous depictions—are currently being prepared for publication.

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